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# Fighting an Invisible Enemy: The Polish Media Campaign Against Radio Free Europe, 1950-1972

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Introduction:

At first glance, the March 19-20 edition of *Gazeta Białostocka*, the official organ of the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP, or PZPR in its Polish abbreviation) in the eastern Polish city of Białystok is not particularly noteworthy. The paper's flag exclaimed, "Proletariats of all countries, unite!" and the front page's largest headline announced the end of a competition of Chopin's piano music in Warsaw. However, if one turned through the paper's pages and reached the last page, a poem titled "Radio 'War Europe'" could be found next to the "Mental Entertainment" section. It read:

Radio War Europe  
It's almost an army.  
Made up of dozens of chaps  
Speaking Polish.

War Europe's an ugly saber,  
With a voice that echoes,  
On its programs is a stamp:  
"So kann man sprechen!"

War Europe, as if from notes  
In Polish about this or that...  
The editor shouts: *sehr gut!*  
*Heil, polnische Patrioten!*

War Europe roars: In Poland there's famine  
Your capital's a ruin...  
The editor rubs his hands: *sehr gut.*  
The editor's boss murmurs: *okay*

The "Polish" speaker is thrilled as a child  
And he hurls buckets of slop at Poland,  
The editor praises him in German.  
With an accent...Hitler-like.

And because he tries so hard,  
For his hateful shouts  
He is given a bonus in Marks-Dollars  
Judas' silver coins.<sup>1</sup>

This poem includes a number of references to frequently-seen themes in Polish propaganda against Radio Free Europe (RFE) — invocations of Nazism, artificial Polishness, the use of Judas' silver coins to pay RFE commentators, and invocations of Cold War saber-rattling on

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<sup>1</sup> Józef Prutkowski, "Radio 'Wojna Europa.'" *Gazeta Białostocka*, March 19-20, 1955, 8. <http://pbc.biaman.pl/dlibra/publication?id=21073>. In Polish, the words for "free" (*wolna*) and "war" (*wojna*) are very similar, creating the opportunity for this poem's author to purposefully interchange the two, turning Radio *Wolna Europa* (Radio Free Europe) into Radio *Wojna Europa* (Radio War Europe).

RFE's part.

Increasingly, the cultural dynamics of the Cold War have been understood as having played as important a role in shaping the conflict and its outcome as the more conventional measures of analysis such as the nuclear arms race and great-power politics.<sup>2</sup> It was in this context that RFE, a nominally private American organization covertly funded by the CIA looking to connect Polish émigrés in the United States with their homeland was formed. In RFE's Polish Desk's initial broadcast from its Munich headquarters on May 3, 1952, Jan Nowak, the desk's director, highlighted the new conflict's new dynamics, telling the listening audience that "today's battles are not fought in forests, streets, or underground," but that the "fight primarily takes place in Polish souls and within the four walls of Polish homes."<sup>3</sup> RFE's side of this battle has been the subject of a number of studies in recent years, most notably Arch Puddington's *Broadcasting Freedom*, and A. Ross Johnson's *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA Years and Beyond*, among others.<sup>4</sup> These works focus broadly on RFE operations across the target countries, not focusing specifically on Poland. Significantly less scholarship exists on the other side of the battle, that of Poland and the rest of the Soviet Bloc's response and resistance to RFE's advances.

The English translation of Paweł Machcewicz's *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe*,

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<sup>2</sup> Linda Risso, "Radio Wars: Broadcasting in the Cold War," *Cold War History* 13, no. 2 (2013): 147, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.757134>.

<sup>3</sup> "Radio Free Europe Inaugural Broadcast to Poland," 6. Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University (hereafter HIA) Arch Puddington collection: 17/1.

<sup>4</sup> Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2000); A. Ross Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA Years and Beyond* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

*1950-1989* is the most extensive work that specifically analyzes Poland's response to RFE in the language.<sup>5</sup> Machcewicz's analysis is divided into four principle categories of Polish government response: technical measures such as jamming of radio waves, diplomatic measures with the United States and West Germany, aimed at negotiating RFE's removal from Munich, security police actions meant to discourage people from listening through intimidation and threats against those who listened, and propaganda.<sup>6</sup> There is, of course, overlap between these four categories. As the level of effectiveness in each one of them shaped the development of the other ones, none can be fully understood in a vacuum. However, this separation is useful in that it defines the various strategies of response in clear ways, allowing for the topic of analysis to be clearly defined. This paper's will focus on the last of these strategies, propaganda.

Over the course of the Cold War, RFE aimed to “[pierce] the Iron Curtain with words of truth,” providing the “dauntless people of their enslaved homeland...the knowledge that the people of Poland [were] not forgotten” by the West.<sup>7</sup> On the Eastern side of the proverbial Iron Curtain, RFE presented a formidable challenge throughout the years of the Cold War to the government of the Polish People's Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa* in Polish, or PRL). Most importantly, it posed a direct threat to the government's attempt to control the information flow in the country, and in response, the government of the PRL's was thrown into a fight against RFE's “words of truth.” In the words of Ralph E. Walter, RFE's Director from 1968 to 1976, it

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<sup>5</sup> Paweł Machcewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe, 1950-1989*, trans. Maya Latynski (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>7</sup> Richard H. Cummings, *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950-1989* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2009), 12.

was RFE's "business to put [itself] out of business."<sup>8</sup> If, as Nowak claimed, the Cold War's battles took place in "Polish souls" inside "the four walls of Polish homes," RFE's counterparts were the state's media organs such as *Radio Warszawa*, *Telewizja Polska*, and various prominent newspapers from around the country.<sup>9</sup> As the dynamics of the Cold War evolved, these sources' attacks against RFE changed as well. Additionally, as RFE and the Polish media sources vied for the population's attention in their coverage of news, sports, and culture, both sides were forced to frequently respond to one another either directly or indirectly, aiming to provide comprehensive coverage in a way that favored their side in the Cold War. Even with these varying factors, a common trend can be traced from the 1950 to 1972, the timespan studied in this paper.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout this entire period, RFE was portrayed to as an obstacle to peace, both that of Poland as well as Europe, and by extension, the whole world. Initially, this threat was represented by

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<sup>8</sup> "Free Europe Department of Information Services," 16 March 1971, 8. Open Society Archives, Budapest (hereafter HU OSA) 300-50-9: Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>9</sup> These were not the only media sources fighting RFE in Poland, but this paper will focus its analysis on Poland's domestic stations. Two of the others should be mentioned: Radio Moscow (Soviet-sponsored), which pursued a similar line to PRL outlets, and Radio Tirana, which was run by Kazimierz Mijal, a Polish neo-Stalinist who left Poland for Albania after Gomulka return to power and alignment with Khrushchev. In November 1970, the Radio Tirana provided the following analysis: "Under the disguise of equality, Zionist-Trotskyite group of Jewish Nationalists look to establish a Jewish state in Poland. The most certain imperialist agent in our country, it happily supports Israel, American Imperialism, and Radio Free Europe." ("Komunikat Nasluchu Radiowego," 27 November 1970. HU OSA 300-50-16: 255/1). Another of Mijal's analyses: "'The garbage heap of the red bourgeoisie, created by the Gomulka-ist revisionists, will flow away like the waters of a crystal-clear mountain stream which has been polluted by gutter dirt.'" (Antoni Marek, "Kazimierz Mijal — Dogmatic Diehard or Political Adventure?," 26 June 1976, 18. HU OSA 300-50-15: 25/12.). Statistics show that few people listened.

<sup>10</sup> Special attention is payed to the early years, that is, the early-to-mid-1950s, as well as the initial years following Edward Gierek's assumption of power in 1970 and the outbreak of strikes in Gdańsk's shipyards, which were framed as an RFE-provoked tragedy.

explicit insinuations of RFE carrying on the legacy of Nazi imperialism in Poland, but over the subsequent decades, this message was moderated. As Cold War tensions eased during the later half of the 1960s and early 70s, RFE was portrayed as an instrument of American imperialism intent on perpetuating Cold War tensions for its own selfish interests, and an obstacle to diplomatic progress in between the Eastern and Western blocs, specifically between Warsaw and Bonn.

### Contextualizing RFE and the Responses to it

As Arch Puddington has written, the model of exerting influence on a foreign country that RFE used was one that broke new ground in diplomatic history.<sup>11</sup> This was a model that stemmed from the US' desire to utilize the political and rhetorical talents of émigrés and exiles who arrived in the US and Western Europe in the years following World War Two.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, because RFE was, in public eyes, not an official part of Cold War policy under direct government control, it was able to say things and act in ways that the government itself was not able to do. If this was an unprecedented development from Washington's point of view, the Polish government had little historical guidance about how such an enemy could be challenged effectively. RFE was not the first foreign broadcaster that had occupied Poland's radio waves; starting in the mid-1930s, Nazi German radio broadcasted messages into Poland targeting the ethnic German minority living there at the time, and throughout World War Two, the BBC's foreign service played an important role in updating Poles on the war's progress.<sup>13</sup> The experience with the

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<sup>11</sup> Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Machcewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe*, 14-15.

German broadcasts in the 1930s, which were allowed to take place without a coordinated response on the part of the government, seem to have influenced the way Poland's response to RFE was conceived, for the detailed reaction to RFE bears no resemblance to the passive one that is found in the pre-1939 example.

In *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe*, Machcewicz places the Polish response to RFE in two different historical processes — that of the Cold War ideological struggle between the American and Soviet spheres of influence, in which information flow, ideology, and culture were key elements, as well as a part of the narrative of Communist dictatorships' struggles to win over the hearts and minds of its citizens. RFE was a threat to the PRL on both these fronts, serving as both an external enemy in the overarching ideological conflict, as well as an internal threat in the context of the government's efforts to gain legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.<sup>14</sup> Thus, fighting RFE was, for the Polish state, a piece of Cold War policy that can be understood as a domestic necessity.<sup>15</sup>

#### The Early Years: Polish Media's Portrayal of RFE as the Carrier of German Expansionism's

##### Legacy

The Poland that emerged out of the ruins of World War Two was comprehensively devastated. A third of the country's urban residents were gone, as were half of its lawyers, forty percent of its doctors, and a third of its professors and Catholic clergy. All tolled, roughly three million Polish Jews and some two million ethnic Poles lay dead at the end of the war.<sup>16</sup> In the ruins of this

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>16</sup> Jan Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz, An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006), 4.

proud nation, a foreign and unpopular system of government was implanted by the “liberating” Soviet Union through electoral manipulation, and by the 1947 gathering of nine European communist parties in Szklarska Poręba, a Polish resort town, it became evident that Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin’s intention was not just to implement Communism in the central and eastern European countries under his control, but to do so following a rigid model that was to be adopted in each country, regardless of popular desires.<sup>17</sup>

Of all the countries in the Soviet Bloc, Poland was perhaps the most unnatural fit for communism. Given the country’s historical animosity with Russia, deep Catholic roots, and lack of pre-war democratic support for socialist or communist parties,<sup>18</sup> RFE’s broadcasts to Poland promoting “Western” values such as open flow of information and democracy would seem to reach eager ears. Therefore, the Polish government’s response to RFE’s broadcasts can be characterized as one of nuance-less reaction.<sup>19</sup> Rather than trying to counter RFE’s messages or engaging with them in any meaningful way, the Polish government counter punched, attacking RFE from multiple fronts.<sup>20</sup> In each of these, RFE was presented by Polish media as an obstacle

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>18</sup> Electoral politics from the years prior to 1939 indicate that Leftist parties received higher support in, say, Czechoslovakia, than they did in Poland.

<sup>19</sup> While RFE’s very first broadcasts to Poland began in 1950, it was not until May 3, 1952 that RFE’s Polish Desk opened in Munich. In pre-Communist times, May 3 was a Polish holiday celebrating the signing of the signing of the May 3 Constitution in 1791, a fact that was not lost on the directors of the Polish Desk.

<sup>20</sup> This style of response can be found across the Soviet bloc during these years. In 1950, Moscow launched a “Hate America” initiative, which presented the US as a militant threat to the USSR’s championing of peace. (Anna Mazurkiewicz, *Uchodźcy Polityczni z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w Amerykańskiej Polityce Zimnowojennej, 1948-1954* (Warszawa-Gdańsk: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2016), 37).



to the maintenance of peace in post-war Europe.

During the first half of the 1950s, as Stalin remained at the head of the Soviet Union until his death in 1953, and his Polish emulator, Bolesław Bierut held on to power until 1956, the Polish government repeatedly drew links between RFE's Polish desk's location in Munich and that city's Nazi legacy. A later RFE document reflected on a speech given in 1954 by Polish Central Committee secretary Edward Ochab, extensively quoting his discussion of “the anti-Polish and anti-democratic slander which the Neo-Hitlerite barking stations are spreading.”<sup>21</sup> Given that one can find this sort of rhetoric at the highest levels of government, it is unsurprising that the era's publications matched or even exceeded Ochab's venom. A 1952 cartoon dripping with irony in the *Chłopska Droga* newspaper depicted a RFE commentator speaking into a swastika-adorned microphone, saying “Speaking to you is the proven friend of the Poles.” In a final touch, the speaker bares an armband baring the designation “CAPO.”<sup>22</sup> Other cartoons of the era often placed RFE's speaker speaking from the mouth of German soldiers identified by their helmet or SS marks on their collars, or as being in the hands of American capitalists and imperialists.<sup>23</sup> Cartoons, however, were not the only means by which Polish propaganda aimed to connect RFE to Nazism's legacy.

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<sup>21</sup> Erik Hazelhoff and Henry O. Hart, “Allegations of ‘German Control’ of RFE in the Polish Press and Radio,” 6 April 1959, 1. HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 711/6.

<sup>22</sup> *PRL atakuje Radio “Wolna Europa”: Teksty, rysunki i karykatury z prasy, radia, telewizji i wydawnictw książkowych*, ed. Alina Grabowska (Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Ossolineum, 2002), 19. “Capos” were concentration camp inmates (usually Jewish) selected by the SS to police prisoners from within, and often had a reputation for brutality. The cartoon's implication seems to be that RFE's Poles were of similar integrity to the Capos, serving their masters in their oppression of their own people.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 35; *Ibid.*, 62.

*Radio Warszawa II*'s February 23, 1955 broadcast focused heavily on RFE, claiming that the American-funded "Freies Europa, which in Polish-language broadcasts, tries to turn Poles against the People's Poland, and in German broadcasts, tells Germans to take from Poland its Western lands."<sup>24</sup> This excerpt contains pieces from a number of themes of the era's propaganda against RFE. Referring to RFE by its name in German — "Freies Europa" — was a frequently used tactic, one that aimed at discrediting RFE's claims of being an institution representing Poles. In at least once instance, Warsaw cabaret shows featured microphones with "Radio Freies Europa" written on them, with the humor coming from the announcement "that the speaker would quote exclusively" from its programs.<sup>25</sup> In an earlier attempt to explain the origins of this name, a 1952 article in the *Życie Warszawy* newspaper, drew a connection between the "Freies" in "Freies Europa" and the "gates to Hitler's concentration camps" which "always bore a sign that read "Arbeit macht frei."<sup>26</sup> Another good example of explicit linking of RFE with Nazism can be found in *Radio Warszawa* commentator Wanda Odolska's comments on March 13, 1955. After first declaring RFE to be a "branch of the American office of psychological war, a propaganda instrument of [West German Chancellor] Adenauer's politics of hatred toward Poland," Odolska launched into an extensive attack on RFE. "Free Europe is, then, an American-Bonn organ," she declared, "which for dollars and marks, in absolute agreement with the Warsaw

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<sup>24</sup> "Komunikat Nasłuchu Radiowego (hereafter KNR)," 23 February 1955, 3003. HU OSA 300-50-16: 37/4.

<sup>25</sup> William E. Griffith to Lewis Galantiere, 17 September 1956, 2. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 17/6.

<sup>26</sup> Machcewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe*, 57.

murderers,<sup>27</sup> with concentration camp executioners, with Hitler-ites who managed to escape the knot, produces venom through its microphones.”<sup>28</sup>

This commentary characterizes the principle response to RFE found in the early-to-mid 50s very well. Clearly, great emphasis is placed on the fact that RFE was fundamentally not a Polish station, but it is not entirely clear whose interests RFE was actually serving. Odolska refers to RFE both an instrument of American psychological warfare and of Adenauer’s anti-Polish policies, while simultaneously remaining in collaboration with former Nazis. This is a confusing array of allegations, but at their essence, they all serve to portray RFE as a fundamental antagonist to peace for the PRL. Given the devastation wrought by Germany on Poland during World War Two, it was most convenient for the organs of Polish propaganda that RFE’s Polish desk was based in Munich, allowing for easy connections to be made between RFE’s broadcasts and the legacy of Nazism. Additionally, there were occasional cases of RFE hiring former Nazis or Nazi collaborators who ended up in the US, most notably Valerian Trifa, the Archbishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church in North America and Fascist political activist, so the RFE-Nazi ties were not entirely fabricated.<sup>29</sup> And even as the allegations of RFE acting in the interests of neo-Nazi or revanchist German interests gradually moderated in tone, moving away from the all-out assaults such as Odolska’s, the theme of RFE and West Germany being threats to post-war peace persisted. Indeed, even as late as April 1972, *Radio Warszawa* discussed the “Munich megalomania” of RFE, which sought to “overturn the results of the second [world] war,” saying

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<sup>27</sup> Likely a reference to the German response to the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.

<sup>28</sup> “KNR,” 13 March 1955, 4005. HU OSA 300-50-16: 38/2.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Simpson. *Blowback: America’s Recruitment of Nazis and Its Effects on the Cold War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 136.

that “those going to the third [world] war...are those who lost the second.”<sup>30</sup> This is an interesting reversal of the more commonly imagined narrative of the threat to post-war European peace being the competing interests of the United States and Soviet Union, countries that won World War Two. Rather than being portrayed as an article of American imperialism bent on shaping the post-1945 world, RFE is made out as a revanchist German agent.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, because RFE sought to operate as a Polish station, responding to domestic developments as if it were based in the country,<sup>32</sup> the anti-Polish nature and foreign control of RFE was stressed here as a way of discrediting its legitimacy as the self-appointed “Voice of Free Poland.” The Poles working for RFE’s Polish Desk were therefore frequent targets of regime propaganda. One of the most common references made when discussing these individuals was to “Judas’ silver coins.” The poem on the first page of this article closes with two lines about the commentator’s bonus being payed in “Marks-Dollars, Judas’ silver coins.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, a 1972 Polish-language broadcast of *Radio Moskwa* declared that “American imperialism, one way or the other, always finds in its funds these 30 silver coins, which they use to pay off dirty work against peace and safety among Europe’s nations and other parts of the world.”<sup>34</sup> *Radio Warszawa*, when discussing the head of RFE’s Polish Desk, Jan Nowak, in another 1972 broadcast could not help but throw in a reference to the captain of the “CIA’s Munich

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<sup>30</sup> “KNR,” 20 April 1972, 40. HU OSA 300-50-16: 283/1.

<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note, too, that a commonly given reason for why Germany marched off to World War Two was the fact that it lost World War One; perhaps, *Radio Warszawa* is suggesting, history may be repeating itself.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Prutkowski, “Radio ‘Wojna Europa,’” 8.

<sup>34</sup> “KNR,” 8 March 1972, 56. HU OSA 300-50-16: 281/1.

microphone's relationship with "Judas' silver coins."<sup>35</sup> Cartoons depicting RFE's commentators as machines relying on "CIA silver coins" also appeared in the Polish press.<sup>36</sup>

According to the *Bible*, Judas was payed 30 silver coins to betray Jesus to Roman soldiers.<sup>37</sup> Since then, 30 silver coins been understood to symbolize the price of betrayal. In this case, the Polish emigres employed by RFE are likened to Judas, being payed off to betray Jesus (Poland), giving a sense of religious martyrdom to the Polish nation, and placing RFE in an un-holy and deceitful light. Indeed, Polish media sources made it clear to all that just because RFE broadcasted in Polish, this did not mean it had Poland's interests in mind. *Telewizja Polska* established this clearly in a 1969 telecast. After an extensive discussion of Radio "Freies Europa," it declared "the emigres don't love People's Poland." In truth, the emigres were said to "have a negative approach." To sum up the discussion, the commentator, Kazimierz Kakol, declared that "not everyone who speaks in Polish, thinks and feels in Polish."<sup>38</sup>

The examples discussed in this section, while varied, carry a common theme. The peaceful world that Poland, along much of the rest of Europe, so desired in the aftermath of World War Two's wreckage, as well as domestic peace in Poland itself, were both presented as being threatened by RFE. RFE's supposed connections to Nazism and German revanchism made its presence on Polish airwaves a danger to international security in the area. Conversely, its criticism and antagonism toward the People's Poland that emerged under Soviet control after the

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<sup>35</sup> "KNR," 11 January 1972, 38. HU OSA 300-50-16: 278/1.

<sup>36</sup> "Polish Press Summary (hereafter PPS), NO. 77-6143.A.," 7 April 1971, 7. HU OSA 300-50-9: 2/3.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 26:15.

<sup>38</sup> "KNR," 10 July 1969, 67. HU OSA 300-50-16: 231/2.

war was presented as a threat to the Polish nation-state, the existence of which was greatly significant to Poles, especially after the war.

Beyond Germany's recent role in World War Two, other developments taking place at this time furthered Polish fears about West Germany's place in the post-World War Two world. As the economic miracle known as the *Wirtschaftswunder* and large increase in foreign trade throughout the 1950s began to take their effects, West Germany seemed poised to return to its pre-war role as a hub of economic power in central Europe.<sup>39</sup> This was a wholly unwelcome development for Poland and the rest of the Soviet bloc, and with West Germany's inclusion in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, fears grew. These fears were realized in an even more concrete form in 1955, when West Germany joined the NATO in 1955, legitimizing the renewed existence of a German army. Subsequent discussions between Washington and Bonn about the prospect of a nuclear-armed West Germany — during which the commander of NATO, General Lauris Norstad publicly stated that “atomic weapons were absolutely indispensable” for West Germany's defense — further alarmed the Soviet bloc, which was already unstable in the aftermath of Stalin's death.<sup>40</sup>

These developments reinforced Polish fears about German revanchism, making RFE's West German connection and Poles' negative opinion towards Germany appealing topics in the PRL's attempts to discredit and undermine the station's message. Even in the mid-1960s, a RFE audience research survey indicated that a total of 79 percent of Poles named Germany (78 percent) or West Germany (one percent) as a country toward their “countrymen have unfriendly

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<sup>39</sup> William I. Hitchcock, *The Struggle For Europe: The Turbulent History of A Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 142-46.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-15.

feelings.” Further research showed that among these respondents, age and political orientation had little impact in determining respondents’ opinions.<sup>41</sup> It is entirely rational, then, that PRL would take the approach it did in countering RFE during this time. The vast majority of its population still harbored strong anti-German convictions, and West Germany’s reemergence, initially as an economic power, but then also as a military one posed tangible threats to the PRL, ones that had to be capitalized on in the battle against RFE.

#### Detente: RFE’s Place in Polish-West German Bilateral Relations in the Ostpolitik Years

PRL propaganda against RFE focused on many different topics, and as one would expect, some were more effective than others. While claims made by PRL media outlets about RFE’s supposed subordination to US Intelligence services, lack of journalistic integrity and other topics never were picked up on by Poland’s citizens, the claim that RFE served West German interests was likely the most effective of all those levied against it.<sup>42</sup> A principal factor in this reality was West Germany and the US’ lack of acknowledgment of Poland’s Western border on the Oder-Neisse line, which had moved a westward to what was known as the Oder-Neisse line after World War Two, leading to a massive expulsion of ethnic Germans from this area. These groups of Germans from Silesia (now part of Western Poland) and the Sudetenland (part of Czechoslovakia after the war) played an important role in West German electoral politics of the era, and even as late as 1970, a push for official recognition of the permanence of Poland’s Western border in the Bundestag would threaten to bring down Willy Brandt’s government.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> “Anti-German Sentiments in Poland,” May 1965, 2-4. HU OSA 300-6-2:1/6.

<sup>42</sup> Machcewicz, *Poland’s War on Radio Free Europe*, 58.

<sup>43</sup> “RFE Programming on German Affairs, 1 April - 30 June 1970,” 5P. HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 1765/7.

Due to foreign policy considerations beyond RFE's control, it avoided bringing up the Oder-Neisse issues, knowing that nothing it said would change the fact that this was a border unrecognized by Washington. RFE recognized that even "the otherwise disunited Polish emigration" agreed on their demand for recognition of the Oder-Neisse line.<sup>44</sup> However, RFE's place in Munich depended on continued goodwill from the West German government, and then-US Intelligence Agency director George V. Allen even went so far as to write to President Dwight Eisenhower, whose support for RFE was well known,<sup>45</sup> to tell him that "we cannot make friends with the Poles at the expense of the Germans."<sup>46</sup>

Regarding this topic, RFE operated under the dual assumptions that "any position not wholly endorsing Poland's retention of the full Western Territories would be offensive to Polish listeners," and "any position which was would be offensive to West Germany" (emphases original).<sup>47</sup> Similarly, a 1953 guidance for RFE broadcasts to Poland declared that "every Pole on earth, in Poland and out, looks upon Oder-Neisse as Poland's immutable frontier. Every German desires to see it pushed back. Nobody else on earth takes sides."<sup>48</sup> Faced with what was termed

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<sup>44</sup> "NCFE and the German Problem-After Ratification of the Contractual Agreements," 6 April 1953, 4. HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 1764/1.

<sup>45</sup> Eisenhower had even campaigned publicly as part of the Crusade for Freedom, a major public funding initiative undertaken as part of the effort to mask the principal source of RFE funds, which was the CIA.

<sup>46</sup> George V. Allen, "Memorandum for The President," 19 August 1959, 2. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 6/4.

<sup>47</sup> J.L. Dunning, Memorandum, 14 November 1958, 1. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 18/9.

<sup>48</sup> "Poland — Guidance No. 15," 6 January 1953, 3. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 16/12.



“the great propaganda challenge facing us,”<sup>49</sup> RFE explicitly prohibited its commentators from saying anything about Poland’s western border beyond just repeating “official statements of the governments concerned.”<sup>50</sup> Broadcasts dealing specifically with West Germany were instructed to include the fact that West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, “though opposed to the permanence of the Oder-Neisse frontier,” was “a true Christian and friend of humanity with whom Polish patriots can talk even if they do not always agree with him,”<sup>51</sup> but beyond that, the FRG was a topic that had little potential for a positive outcome.

RFE’s awkward avoidance of the subject was not missed by its listeners. A letter sent to RFE in early 1966 from a resident of Szczecin, Poland, declared that ““You don’t say anything about the Western border...Christ demanded that we forgive our enemies. I cannot forgive the muderers of children and old people. I cannot forgive their successors like Jaksch and others. I will never forgive his [Jaksch’s] faithful servant, Radio Free Europe.”<sup>52</sup> Presented with this opportunity, the PRL propaganda apparatus leapt at the chance to highlight RFE’s apparent anti-Polish nature, as it provided it with an unparalleled opportunity to build its own credibility as the defender of the border, as well as the chance to demonstrate RFE’s artificial Polishness. The PRL declared itself as the guarantor of this border, creating a legitimate source of credibility among

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<sup>49</sup> Stuart L. Hannon to John Dunning, 7 March 1958. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 18/8.

<sup>50</sup> “Special Polish Guidance Notes,” 4. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 16/10.

<sup>51</sup> “Poland — Guidance No. 15,” 3.

<sup>52</sup> “Poland: Audience Mail, 1 January - 31 March 1966,” 14. HU OSA 300-6-2: 2/2. The “Jaksch” referred to here is likely Wenzel Jaksch, an ethnic German from the Sudetenland who was president of the Federation of Expellees at the time of this letter’s writing.

the Polish population.<sup>53</sup> Polish media met RFE's descriptions of Adenauer as a respectable potential partner with descriptions of him as "Bonn's Hitler."<sup>54</sup> This was opportunity also available to Czechoslovak propagandists in their work against RFE. Broadly speaking, the Poles and Czechs had similar experiences of wartime German occupation, mass-expulsion of Germans after the war and the securing of western borders guaranteed by the Soviet Union. As a result, Poland and Czechoslovakia emerged as the biggest problems posed to post-war American-West German relations.<sup>55</sup> This gave Poland and Czechoslovakia a significant advantage in creating counter-RFE propaganda over a country like, say Hungary, which, based on its wartime experience, did not have a natural enemy in the Germans or a controversial border.<sup>56</sup> In order to highlight this topic, the Poles and Czechs collaborated extensively, even to the point that a "Miss Oder-Neisse" pageant was held in Czechoslovakia in 1970. The winner, a 20-year-old from the Polish city of Jelenia Góra named Halina Olender, receiving hearty congratulations from Polish radio.<sup>57</sup>

As the Cold War wore on, however, PRL propaganda outlets became increasingly aware of the fact that they were losing their battle against RFE. Audience research carried out by RFE in 1962 showed that a third of respondents (refugees or visitors in Western Europe) could not remember what Polish regime propaganda had said about RFE, while another eighteen percent

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<sup>53</sup> "KNR," 29 January, 1970, 68. HU OSA 300-50-16: 241/2.

<sup>54</sup> "KNR NR. 164," 11 May 1952, 1676. HU OSA 300-50-16: 2/1.

<sup>55</sup> William E. Griffith to Lewis Galantiene, 5 July 1954, 30. HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 1764/2.

<sup>56</sup> "Hungarian Regime Policy on Attacks Against Western Broadcasts," July 1955, 1-5. HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 711/13.

<sup>57</sup> "KNR," 16 May 1970, 33. HU OSA 300-50-16: 246/2.

said they didn't know of any attacks or did not give an answer.<sup>58</sup> Another survey showed that just ten percent of 320 respondents agreed that regime propaganda against RFE was "effective to some degree."<sup>59</sup> These facts were not lost on the PRL, and led to an evolution in strategy in the 1960s. In 1968, Polish propagandist Jerzy Solecki outlined the importance of changing the way RFE was to be dealt with in Polish media:

At one time we used to say: let us jam. Then we said, let us not jam since decent people don't listen to it anyway. We must give up, once and for all, the pretense that nothing is going on. We must give it up and treat these propaganda media as a real political force which reaches within our country. The coming era will most probably be characterized by the fact that all the oppositional or disintegrative forces inside the country shall be increasingly exploiting these foreign information media, that they will find support there. This demands a very serious study of the problem on our part and a careful choice of the means of counteraction.<sup>60</sup>

Among the most important things seen in this quote is the way in which Solecki refers to RFE. Gone were the times when RFE was referred to an instrument of Nazism hanging on in the post war world; rather, it is described as a "propaganda media" or a "foreign information media." Instead of RFE being characterized as a force of revanchist German or other foreign interests, it was now seen as a "real political force within Poland." Perhaps with this in mind, an Ideological Commission was created at the Fifth Party Congress in November 1968, headed by a secretary of the Party Central Committee, Jan Szydlak.

In May 1969 interview with Warsaw's *Politika* magazine, Szydlak explained that "improving the form and methods of propaganda lies first of all in the most truthful, most complete

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<sup>58</sup> "The Impact and Effect of Regime Press and Radio Attacks Against RFE on Polish Respondents," September 1962, 9. HU OSA 300-6-2: 1/1.

<sup>59</sup> "Polish Surveys, 1958-1960." HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 716/10.

<sup>60</sup> "The New Character of Communist Reactions to RFE Broadcasts," 1. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 19/8.

presentation of the essence of our policy...Modern propaganda cannot bear pomposity, it must be brief, to the point, and discreet — in other words, light, not heavy and insistent, since in the latter case it becomes its own denial.” This contrasts greatly to the standard form of Stalinist-era propaganda in the Soviet Union and its satellites, in which “repetition...was the cornerstone of successful propaganda.”<sup>61</sup> Finally, in words that could have been spoken by a tactician of American psychological warfare fifteen years earlier, Szydlak added that “good propaganda should be a dialogue, not a monologue,” and that “a propagandist, if he wants to be heard, must realize that he is not acting in a vacuum.”<sup>62</sup> This seems to be case of the PRL learning from its enemy. Essentially, the Polish propaganda apparatus was realizing, many years after RFE had begun with this new form of propaganda, that it was, in fact, more effective than anything Polish media had been doing, and so, it decided to emulate RFE. This was not a shift designed to be gradual or subtle. Perhaps as a test-run of this open emulation, the Polish Journalists’ Union announced in its July 1969 issue of its monthly magazine *Prasa Polska* that a new ““Center for the Study of East-West Relations”” was being created, as well as a new ““subversive TV system on the model of Radio Free Europe.”” These new creations were designed for countering RFE and the “tactics of ‘modern imperialism,’” whose “hostile ideology” was seen as “[seeping] in” to Poland.<sup>63</sup>

These changes can be understood as the result of the PRL bettering its understanding of how RFE operated, and what its goals were — in essence, RFE had now existed for well over a

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<sup>61</sup> Gross, *Fear*, 240.

<sup>62</sup> “The New Character of Communist Reactions to RFE Broadcasts,” 16-17.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

decade, and the PRL had taken advantage of that time to gain a full understanding of RFE's operations, which resulted in changes in the focus of propaganda against them. These shifts can be observed beginning as early as 1959. Rather than explicitly linking RFE to Nazism as had commonly been done during the first part of the decade, Polish media moderated its message and sought to discredit RFE's claims of being a Polish station from abroad by emphasizing the fact that RFE's Munich base forced RFE to play to West German interests. As a result of this, Polish media's references to RFE's "German sponsorship" jumped to twenty-eight percent in the first half of 1959, up from two percent a year prior.<sup>64</sup> The switches that Solecki and Szydlak identified as being necessary began to take place at the same time as one of the most important developments in post-1945 European diplomatic history: Willy Brandt's 1969 election as West German Chancellor and subsequent decision to open diplomatic relations with East Germany and the rest of the Eastern Bloc.

As Brandt opened up diplomatic talks with the PRL, Polish media organs were quick to point out the contradiction between Brandt's supposed desire for good relations with the socialist countries and West Germany's continued hosting of RFE. In April 1970, *Trybuna Ludu* wrote that West Germany's recognition of Poland's Western border on the Oder-Neisse line was a prerequisite for further diplomatic talks.<sup>65</sup> *Telewizja Polska* made similar comments on the presence of the "sabotaging station," RFE, on West German soil as the biggest problem for the process of normalizing relations. It added that if it was necessary, Poland would wait for the "full disassembly" of RFE in West Germany, thereby putting the responsibility for creating an

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<sup>64</sup> Hazelhoff and Hart, "Allegations of 'German Control,'" 2.

<sup>65</sup> "KNR," 22 April 1970, 16. HU OSA 300-50-16: 245/1.

atmosphere in which diplomatic talks could progress on Bonn's shoulders.<sup>66</sup> Along similar lines, *Radio Warszawa II*'s analysis of the situation led it to accuse RFE of impeding the process of Poland's normalization of relations with West Germany.<sup>67</sup>

At this time, the PRL's fight against RFE increasingly employed diplomatic tactics. Polish representatives "strongly [attacked] RFE activity" during the first Polish-West German conversations. These attacks did not fall on deaf ears — West German State Secretary Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz supposedly remarked that at this time "it is very difficult to talk with representatives of the Polish Government while at the same time Mr. Jan Nowak from Munich, from German territory, is vociferating daily against the Polish Government."<sup>68</sup> Another of the most notable points of this of this diplomatic campaign against RFE came in May 1971, when Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Jędrzychowski delivered official notes of protest about RFE's continued presence in Munich to Bonn and Washington.<sup>69</sup> These efforts to undermine RFE through conventional diplomatic channels are not this paper's primary focus, but they are nonetheless important, for they contextualize the propaganda attacks. Polish media's allegations of RFE being an obstacle to diplomacy and even a threat to Ostpolitik's on the whole<sup>70</sup> were not occurring in a vacuum; they were complemented by the diplomatic realities of the time.

In August 1970, *Radio Warszawa* announced that West German government spokesperson

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<sup>66</sup> "KNR," 27 May 1972, 29-30. HU OSA 300-50-16: 284/3.

<sup>67</sup> "KNR," 31 May 1971, 77. HU OSA 300-50-16: 265/4.

<sup>68</sup> Zdenko Antic to Ralph E. Walter, 14 April 1970, 1. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 17/3.

<sup>69</sup> "East Europe and Radio Free Europe in an 'Era of Negotiation,'" 16. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 18/5.

<sup>70</sup> "RFE Broadcasts to Poland," 5. HIA, Arch Puddington Collection: 17/4.

Conrad Ahlers announced that the topic of revoking RFE's (referred to here as that "known diversionary station in Munich — Free Europe") broadcasting license in West Germany had not yet come in to question. In response, *Radio Warszawa* brought up an article in *Życie Warszawy*, which asked rhetorically how West Germany could maintain such contradictory elements as good faith negotiations with Poland and an "anti-Polish psychological war station on its land?"<sup>71</sup> *Życie Warszawy* later observed that as West Germany's responses about prolonging RFE presence on its land grew increasingly defensive, they turned away from listing the positive attributes of RFE, focusing instead on RFE's constitutional rights in the FRG. However, the article says, this argument of constitutionality was a faulty one — it was apparently in complete opposition to West Germany's constitution to host a station as RFE.<sup>72</sup> Indeed a subsequent article claimed the West Germans "must have forgotten, that the same constitution [that is used to defend RFE's presence] forbids incitement (*podżegania*)."<sup>73</sup> In reality, Bonn legally recognized RFE as a "foreign non-profit organization operating in Germany under German law," and reserved the right to "demand immediate cessation of any RFE transmissions" that it judged to be against West German policies.<sup>74</sup> Constitutionally, then, Bonn held significant power over RFE, though it seems unlikely that it ever would have invoked it in a way that would provoke the US.

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<sup>71</sup> "KNR," 5 August 1970, 36-37. HU OSA 300-50-16: 249/3.

<sup>72</sup> "KNR," 3 June 1971, 21. HU OSA 300-50-16: 266/1.

<sup>73</sup> "KNR" 8 June 1971, 19. HU OSA 300-50-16: 266/2.

<sup>74</sup> A. Ross Johnson, "The Uninvited Guest — Radio Free Europe in the Federal Republic of Germany," in *Voices of Freedom — Western Interference?: 60 Years of Radio Free Europe*, edited by Anna Bischof and Zuzana Jürgens (Munich: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 78-79.

Eventually, it became clear that the diplomatic pressures being exerted on Bonn and Washington were not producing any sort of change. This stagnation was blamed on RFE and the West's world views.. In the words of *Radio Warszawa* commentator Jozef Winiewicz, it seemed "that in the USA it is not well understood by everyone, what, in the last years has changed in Europe." This was presented in contrast to the world's socialist countries, who "take the world as it is."<sup>75</sup> In this context, *Radio Warszawa* shifted its focus to approaching the topic from a new direction. It observed that RFE's defenders in West German politics were members of the parliamentary opposition to Brandt's government, and thus were assumed to oppose Ostpolitik. *Życie Warszawy* added that RFE was "neither free, nor Europe," but rather "an outpost of American intelligence in Europe, one of the instruments of psychological war against socialist countries."<sup>76</sup> RFE's supporters were therefore portrayed as being opposed to opening good relations with Poland, committed practitioners of the Cold War and obstacles to peaceful diplomacy.<sup>77</sup>

One can see traces of Jan Szydlak's 1969 comments in the propaganda of this time. Szydlak's analysis of how the PRL's propaganda apparatuses had to improve was based on a respect for facts and the listener or reader's intelligence. Diplomatic pressure is frequently referenced in the radio and newspaper commentaries at this time. While RFE is still shown as an obstacle to peace, as it had been dating back to the early 1950s, it is one that harms diplomacy, rather than simply being the reincarnation of Nazi ideology and imperialism in its radio form. The PRL's

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<sup>75</sup> "KNR," 9 April 1972, 48-49. HU OSA 300-50-16: 282/3.

<sup>76</sup> "KNR," 3 June 1971, 49.

<sup>77</sup> "KNR," 3 July 1971, 23. HU OSA 300-50-16: 267/3.



newspapers and radio stations met Bonn's constitutional arguments defending its hosting of RFE with constitutional arguments of their own, engaging with their opponents and propaganda consumers with intelligence and trust.

The close interaction of diplomatic measures and propaganda during this period can also be understood as the realization of Szydlak's goal of giving the "most complete presentation of the essence of our policy." Additionally, when Szydlak spoke of effective propaganda being a dialogue rather than a monologue, it seems that this would have been what he envisioned.<sup>78</sup> A September 1971 study conducted by RFE's Audience and Public Opinion Research Department indicated that 55 percent of Polish respondents listened to domestic radio "daily" or "nearly every day," while another 34 percent listened "several times a week." This means that a total of 89 percent of respondents listened to Polish domestic radio at least "several times a week," giving people like Szydlak and broadcasters like *Radio Warszawa* a large opportunity to influence the population's outlook on events.<sup>79</sup> Whether this evolution in strategy actually resulted in a decrease in RFE's influence is uncertain. RFE listenership in Poland did decline over the course of the 1970s,<sup>80</sup> but this would not have been the result of just one event. Additionally, even if the broad trend of PRL propaganda was one that took its newspapers and broadcasters in a more moderate direction, this was not uniformly the case. A particularly amusing anecdote comes from a *Telewizja Polska* broadcast on May 27, 1972, in which a piece of art by Michelangelo was reported to have been vandalized. The vandal? "Hungarian emigrant

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<sup>78</sup> The New Character of Communist Reactions to RFE Broadcasts," 16-17.

<sup>79</sup> "The Exposure to the Domestic Radio and Television in Eastern Europe," September 1971, 3. HU OSA 300-6-2: 4/1.

<sup>80</sup> "Listening to Western Radio in East Europe," August 1979, 12. HU OSA 300-6-2: 4/1.

Laszlo Toth, a psychopath, and former employee of Radio Free Europe.”<sup>81</sup> Evidently, these descriptors were meant to complete the the image of the vandal in question. Nonetheless, the evolution of PRL propaganda strategy, while still staying true to the theme of RFE as an obstacle to peace, is, at the very least, clear.

Czechowicz’s Return and CIA Funding Revealed: RFE as an American Cold War Instrument

At the same time as the potential for the PRL to rid itself of RFE in the context of Ostpolitik, two other factors of great significance in the war against RFE developed. These were the return to Poland of Andrzej Czechowicz, in March 1971, a Polish Intelligence Service officer who had infiltrated RFE by posing as a political emigre and was employed for years, and the heated debate in US Congress about RFE’s future, which was called into question for the first time. These events must be understood in the context of two domestic events in Poland: the outbreak of strikes and protests on the country’s north coast after an increase in food prices, and Edward Gierek replacing Gomulka as First Secretary of the PZPR.

Chronologically, one must begin with the outbreak worker discontent in December 1970. On December 12th, the government unexpectedly raised consumer prices on a number of goods and cancelled Christmas bonuses. Two days later, demonstrations among workers in Gdańsk broke out. A couple days later, the protests had spread from Gdańsk across the coastline, and eventually swept through the whole country, a development in which the international press saw RFE playing an instrumental role.<sup>82</sup> Eventually, the army was called in to restore order, and over forty

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<sup>81</sup> “KNR,” 29 May 1972, 44. HU OSA 300-50-16: 284/4.

<sup>82</sup> See “Free Europe Department of Information Services,” 16 March 1971, 3. HU OSA 300-50-9: 1/1 (*Allgemeine Zeitung*); Bert Stoop, “Legacy of the Cold War in Munich: Radio Free Europe Disturbs the Olympic Games,” *Het Vrije Volk*, March 2, 1971. HU OSA 300-50-9: 3/1; “A2, New York, Mar. 15: David Binder Reports in Monday NYT.” HU OSA 300-50-9: 3/1.

people died. On December 20th, the PZPR's Central Committee decided to replace Gomułka with Gierek, who eventually met with workers in Gdańsk. Eventually, the price increases were rescinded.

In this context, faced with the task of defending an unpopular government using the army against its own citizens, Polish media turned to attacking RFE, drawing a connections between its incendiary coverage of the events of the coast and the events themselves. *Radio Gdańsk's* description of the events referenced a *Dziennik Bałtycki* (Baltic Journal) article discussing "vandalism and the development of hooliganism," seen as the result of the "inciting" RFE.<sup>83</sup> *Radio Warszawa II* added that "of course," RFE, besides giving "information dressed in the robes of objectivity, consciously gives commentary designed to stimulate bad moods and open a new enemy front in the country."<sup>84</sup> RFE "baked its roast over the tragic fires in Gdańsk," claimed *Radio Warszawa*, as it and other foreign media sources tried to use the events for their "own purposes."<sup>85</sup> Wary of fanning the fires of discontent across the country, PRL media outlets' coverage of the unrest was slow, a fact that was weakly explained by *Radio Gdańsk* as being the result of its desire to give its audience "objective information, peacefully, and without emotion." This was contrasted with RFE's supposed "improvised" coverage, which was said to be "full of errors."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> "KNR," 18 December 1970, 68. HU OSA 300-50-16: 256/2.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>85</sup> "KNR," 19 December 1970, 21. HU OSA 300-50-16: 256/2; *Ibid.*, 49. This characterization is similar to a reoccurring Radio Moscow line about RFE being responsible for the Prague uprising in 1968.

<sup>86</sup> "KNR," 23 December 1970, 68-69. HU OSA 300-50-16: 256/3.

Clearly, the theme of RFE as an enemy of peace is present here. Rather than being international peace, however, peace is understood here in its domestic context — peace between workers and the government meant to represent. Given the fact that Poland’s workers were protesting a government action, and it was the government using military force to suppress the demonstrations, however, this was not a narrative that convinced many. The PRL’s propaganda apparatus needed something else, and in Czechowicz, it got it.

On March 10, 1971, *Radio Warszawa* announced that a 34-year-old captain in the country’s intelligence service had returned to the country from a “special mission in Munich,” where he had worked for the ““Polish Section”” of the Munich center of sabotage, “whose functioning is directed against our country.”<sup>87</sup> In the days and weeks that followed this initial announcement, Czechowicz appeared across a range of Polish media sources, laying out the grounds of his mission and what he learned about RFE’s operations during his time as an employee. In his initial news conference, he declared that the environment at RFE’s Polish Desk, which had for years claimed to have Poles’ real interests at heart, “had nothing to do with Poland.”<sup>88</sup> Additionally, he reenforced this claim and the years of PRL propaganda questioning the Polishness of RFE’s Poles by proclaiming that of the \$34 million in RFE’s annual budget, \$33 million of it came directly from the CIA.<sup>89</sup> To understand the significance of this claim, a quick jump into American politics is needed.

In 1967, *Ramparts*, an American magazine, published an article bringing the CIA’s role in

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<sup>87</sup> “KNR,” 10 March 1971, 49. HU OSA 300-50-16: 261/1.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

funding organizations such as RFE to light.<sup>90</sup> Initially, this did not receive a wealth of government attention, but starting in January 1971, this changed. Senator Clifford Case introduced a bill (S.18) to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, aiming to bring RFE and RL's operations under greater government control. In doing so, he highlighted the fact that secret CIA budgets had been used for the vast majority RFE and RL's funds, and while the previous fiscal year alone saw \$30 million in CIA funds directed toward the stations through covert accounts, "at no time was Congress asked or permitted to carry out its traditional constitutional role of approving the expenditure."<sup>91</sup> In this context, the S.18 bill was viewed by the Committee on Foreign Relations as way of bringing "into the open the Government's role in financing both Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty." An additional rhetorical blow against the stations came from Senator William Fulbright, who submitted to President Nixon that "these Radios should be given an opportunity to take their rightful place in the graveyard of cold war relics."<sup>92</sup> The Committee on Foreign Relation maintained the assumption that the stations "perform useful broadcast services." but this was qualified with the statement that it was unwilling "to give the Radios the benefit of the doubt beyond the current fiscal year."<sup>93</sup> In Polish media, these developments were understood as being indicative of the intensity with which the Cold War was being perpetuated by the CIA's "real Cold War arguments," much to the displeasure of the

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<sup>90</sup> Machcewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe*, 44.

<sup>91</sup> 92nd Congress, *1st Session*: Senate: Report No. 92-319, "Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty," 2. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP73B00296R000500050010-0.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 143.

<sup>93</sup> Senate: Report No. 92-319, 4.

American public, who were not happy with “using American taxpayer money to pay for Cold War propaganda in the ether.”<sup>94</sup> Here, as has previously been discussed, one can see familiar trends of RFE as an agent of conflict were returned to and built upon.

Thus, in the context of the national discontent after the December 1970 events and the role RFE played in informing Polish citizens of the events taking place, as well as the very public questions about RFE’s future given the Senate discussions in early 1971, Czechowicz was of great importance for PRL propaganda. The timing of his recall alone is indicative of this. In a sense, he was Poland’s version of Józef Światło, a Lieutenant Colonel in Poland’s Office of Public Security who defected to West Germany in 1953, and eventually was delivered into RFE’s hands.<sup>95</sup> Światło’s revelations had an enormous tangible effect on Polish government institutions, as the Ministry of Public Security had been abolished, the former Investigating Department director was arrested, and three vice ministers who had served the Ministry were expelled from the Party’s Central Committee as a result of his insider’s account of their corrupt and brutal mode of operation.<sup>96</sup> Given that Czechowicz’s revelations coincided so well with the Congressional debate about RFE’s future and the heightened anti-RFE campaign as the Olympics approached, this was recognized an important opportunity for PRL propaganda. As a result, it squeezed every drop it could out of Czechowicz.

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<sup>94</sup> “KNR,” 9 April 1972, 50. HU OSA 300-50-16: 282/3; “KNR,” 8 June 1972, 99. HU OSA 300-50-16: 285/2.

<sup>95</sup> Światło’s insider’s account of Polish politics (he had been the head of the department dedicated to maintaining ideological purity among Communist officials) was delivered to RFE’s Polish listeners, and cemented RFE’s place at the top of foreign-based broadcasters to Poland.

<sup>96</sup> Paweł Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, trans. Maya Latynski (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009), 15.

In addition to giving an account of how RFE's Polish Desk functioned, Czechowicz also provided a grim picture of life for Poles abroad. "Seeing it really almost makes one want to cry," Czechowicz claimed about life for Poles in West Germany. "They feel on the margins of everything," and that "nobody likes them." Perhaps as a result of this, he claimed, the "drunkenness was terrible" among Polish immigrants.<sup>97</sup> Similar claims about the misery of Polish life in the West appeared at other times,<sup>98</sup> but it is not hard to imagine that this sort of account carried more weight when it came from the mouth of a high-ranking intelligence agency member (or at the very least, perhaps that what those in power in the PRL thought). Additionally, beyond these frequent appearances on Polish TV and radio in the immediate aftermath of his return, Czechowicz authored multiple books, including a memoir titled "*Seven Hard Years*," all of which were discussed widely across Polish media.<sup>99</sup> These works contained increasingly personal attacks on RFE personnel, especially Jan Nowak, who, during his time fighting in the Warsaw Uprising, was said to have been a German agent, who had been ordered to flee to London when defeat seemed imminent.<sup>100</sup>

Political cartoons of this time provide an interesting insight into the campaign related to

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<sup>97</sup> "KNR," 17 March 1971, 86. HU OSA 300-50-16: 261/3.

<sup>98</sup> "KNR," 2 July 1971, 30. HU OSA 300-50-16: 267/3. This day's *Radio Warszawa II* broadcast contained a particularly notable account from a commentator who had recently traveled to the US, where he claimed the insult "Polack exists alongside" slurs such as the "niger (sic) for blacks" and "Kraut" for Germans.

<sup>99</sup> K. Gołgowska, "Epilog siedmiu lat," *Trybuna Ludu*, August 28, 1974, 8. HU OSA 300-50-9: 2/1. One must wonder, if Czechowicz was the "intelligence ace" he was made out to be, why he was recalled from his mission (which appears to have been going successfully) and relegated to a life of writing propaganda books before he even reached the age of 35.

<sup>100</sup> Machcewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe*, 114.

Czechowicz, beyond the simple repetition of his mission's details and findings. Within these, a common thread of RFE being on its last legs in the wake of Czechowicz's return emerges. On March 28, *Szpilki* magazine ran a cartoon with the caption of "The return of Cpt. Andrzej Czechowicz created anxiety at Radio 'Free Europe'" and an image of two commentators looking at each other nervously, each thinking that the other could be a foreign agent.<sup>101</sup> A month later, *Karuzela* ran a series of cartoons, starting with one of a sign advertising payments in Deutsche Marks for news. The last image in this procession simply showed a candle with "Free Europe" written on it, burning the last bits of its wick.<sup>102</sup>

As is the case with all forms of propaganda, measuring the actual effect of Czechowicz's accounts is difficult. According to *The New York Times*, Polish intellectuals saw Czechowicz as an "unconvincing figure," and a western diplomat was quoted as saying that the main result has been "making intelligent people snicker."<sup>103</sup> In any event, the PRL did not shy away from continuing to use Czechowicz as the lead attacker in its propaganda blitz. By portraying RFE as being on its last legs, approaching a natural death, the forces devoted to perpetuating its existence could then be shown as being Cold War warriors, individuals committed to perpetuating the hostility and animosity that made it so difficult to bring the Cold War to a close. Given the development of Ostpolitik and the criticisms levied against RFE in Washington, as well as the general thaw in tensions during the early 1970s, it was not far-fetched to portray the Cold War's natural disintegration being distorted by forces such as RFE. Thus, again, while the

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<sup>101</sup> "PPS, NO. 73-6139," 1 April 1971. HU OSA 300-50-9: 2/2.

<sup>102</sup> "PPS, NO. 96-6162.A.," 5 May 1971, 9. HU OSA 300-50-9: 2/3.

<sup>103</sup> Alfred Friendly Jr., "Polish Radio Spy Shifts His Attack." *The New York Times*, April 4, 1971, pg. 21. Web. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.



understanding of peace for Poland and the rest of the world had changed from the early 1950s, RFE was portrayed not only as an enemy of the PRL, but as an enemy of European peace and all those who aspired to bring it to the continent.

### The 1972 Olympics: RFE as a Threat to Olympic Peace

The final significant event around which PRL propaganda centered analyzed in this paper is the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich. The 1972 games were not the only time the Soviet Bloc used the Olympics as a platform for criticizing RFE, but the unique circumstances of this Olympiad presented an especially powerful opportunity.<sup>104</sup> It does bear mentioning that Polish media's Olympic coverage was not limited to discussing RFE. Much of the coverage prior to the games focused on patriotic topics such as Poland's national goal of becoming one of the top ten global sports powers at the games, or how good the team looked in its new athletic uniforms.<sup>105</sup>

Nonetheless, the fact that Munich hosted both the Olympics and RFE was not lost on Polish media sources. In the couple of years leading up to the games, PRL propaganda placed great emphasis on the contradiction between the peaceful ideals meant to be promoted by the Olympic games and RFE, which was frequently described as an ideological remnant of the Cold War.<sup>106</sup> In more extreme occurrences, articles in newspapers such as *Sztandar Młodych*, a Polish youth daily, warned that RFE's presence in Munich might even prevent athletes from Polish and other

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<sup>104</sup> Sig Mickelson, "RFE/RL Inc. and the Issue of Accreditation for the 1980 Olympic Games," 16 February 1978, 25. HIA. Sig Mickelson Collection: 9.

<sup>105</sup> "KNR," 23 September 1971, 90. HU OSA 300-50-16: 271/4; "KNR," 22 August 1970, 23. HU OSA 300-50-16: 250/2.

<sup>106</sup> "KNR," 21 February 1971, 18. HU OSA 300-50-16: 260/1.

socialist countries from competing.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, some of the references to Nazism and German revanchism that had played such a large role in Polish media's discussion of RFE during the 1950s returned. An example can be seen in *Radio Warszawa II*'s quick observation in its Olympic coverage that Munich was the "capital of the Hitlerite movement," and that it was in Munich that "Hitler drank beer and gave his first fascist orations."<sup>108</sup>

The presentation of the 1972 Summer Olympics are best understood as a component of Ostpolitik, an opportunity for West Germany to open itself to the world, regardless of ideology, and in the words of Willy Brandt, "introduce modern Germany to the worldwide public."<sup>109</sup> Perhaps in a deliberate attempt to counter the international memory of the last Olympics hosted in Germany, the 1936 Summer Games in Berlin, International Olympic Committee (IOC) Head Avery Brundage deemed the Munich games the "greatest peaceful occasion' in history."<sup>110</sup> In terms of how PRL propaganda sought to portray RFE in this Olympic context, two goals were outlined, which were pursued along with the other Soviet bloc countries: a "maximal" goal of forcing RFE and RL (Radio Liberty) out of West Germany entirely, and a "minimal" goal of preventing the stations from receiving official accreditation to cover the games.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "Working Draft: 'East European and Soviet Campaign to Oust RFE from West Germany since January 1, 1970,'" 21. HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 1765/1.

<sup>108</sup> "KNR," 23 May 1970, 51. HU OSA 300-50-16: 246/3.

<sup>109</sup> R. Gerald Hughes and Rachel J. Owen, "The Continuation of Politics by Other Means': Britain, the Two Germanys and the Olympic Games, 1949-1972," *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 4 (November 2009): 471. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.ups.edu/docview/204200728?OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:primo&accountid=1627>.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

<sup>111</sup> Mickelson, "RFE/RL Inc. and the Issue of Accreditation for the 1980 Olympic Games," 27-28.

There is a similarity in the way the PRL treated Olympics as in the way the Oder-Neisse topic was dealt with — with a blend of propaganda and diplomatic pressure in which both strategies were furthered by the others' successes. One of the best examples of this can be seen in the IOC's decision, just days after Czechowicz's return, to send letters to both RFE and RL in March 1971. The letters asked the stations to "keep an olympic truce" throughout the duration of the games by refraining from broadcasting any "political propaganda programs."<sup>112</sup> The fact that the letters came after a significant campaign not just by the PRL, but in coordination with countries across the Soviet bloc in using the Olympics as a point of leverage against RFE is indicative of the close relationship between propaganda campaigns and tangible results.

At this time, the Polish campaign to ensure the Munich games remained free of political agitation was already well underway. In May 1970, *Radio Warszawa* reported that Włodzimierz Reczek, the head of the Polish Olympic Committee, had commented on the upcoming Munich games by stating his wish that they remain free of any "accents of racial, religious, or political discrimination."<sup>113</sup> Clearly, this sort of commentary brought back echoes of the 1936 Olympics in its references to racial and religious discrimination, but the political aspect brought is a product of the Cold War, of which RFE was an integral part. While there are some examples of un-nuanced attacks on the Munich games such as East German press pointing out that "'36+'36 = 72," making the 1972 games a "super demonstration of the spirit of 1936,"<sup>114</sup> the majority of Polish coverage of the problems of the games focused not on Germany or its history. Instead, it

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<sup>112</sup> "Free Europe Department of Information Services," 16 March 1971, 11.

<sup>113</sup> "KNR," 14 May 1970, 94. HU OSA 300-50-16: 246/1.

<sup>114</sup> "Free Europe Department of Information Services," 16 March 1971, 3.

focused predominately on the way the US and its radio stations were holding West Germany hostage by forcing it to host RFE. This was described as being detrimental to the Olympic spirit and a source of outrage for people around the world.

Upon his return, Czechowicz had declared that Brandt regarded RFE as an obstacle to Ostpolitik, and that though “he is doing what he can...he will have a tough nut to crack, because the US secret service will fight this step with all its might.”<sup>115</sup> With this narrative of RFE’s presence in Munich as the result of pressure from Washington, the Olympic context was then used to further the sense of RFE’s antagonism to the ideas of goodwill that the Olympics are meant to feature. Additionally, something close to pity towards West Germany, which was saddled with the burden of RFE, was conveyed. Polish radio made frequent references to articles in the West German press about RFE and the Olympics. The West German daily *Vorwaerts* was referenced as being afraid of how easy it would be for “some sort of provocation during the Olympics which would tarnish the name of the Germans and break the beautiful Olympic ideal.”<sup>116</sup> Such a provocation would presumably come from RFE. *Radio Warszawa II* also referenced a *Neues Deutschland* article which lamented the fact that the US government maintained its “Munich sabotage center.” It also claimed that RFE’s “Cold War functioning ruins the atmosphere of the approaching Olympic games.”<sup>117</sup> The next day, *Radio Warszawa II*’s commentator discussed *Frankfurter Rundschau*’s prediction that as the Olympics approached,

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>116</sup> “KNR,” 27 February 1971, 64. HU OSA 300-50-16: 260/3.

<sup>117</sup> “KNR,” 1 June 1971, 62. HU OSA 300-50-16: 266/1.

the calls for Bonn to revoke RFE and RL's broadcasting licenses would only grow stronger.<sup>118</sup>

Throughout the months leading up to the games, Polish media repeatedly made references to West German press when discussing RFE. The use of sources from abroad allowed *Telewizja Polska* to wonder aloud whether West Germany would decide to revoke RFE's license, and present this question as a legitimate response to its study of West German press coverage of RFE and the Olympics.<sup>119</sup> One can return again to Solecki and Szydlak's comments about the need for a new sort of propaganda in Poland, one that interacted with the world around it and refrained from relying on monologue. RFE's place as an adversary to the Olympic spirit was not presented as an issue only for Poland; rather, it was something that *Radio Warszawa's* Munich correspondent declared was "protested around the world."<sup>120</sup> When Bundestag Deputy Karl-Heinz Hansen wrote to the US government calling for the end of RFE and RL presence on FRG soil on what he declared to be the basis of West German sovereignty and a measure to preserve Olympic peace, *Radio Warszawa* was quick to report it, for again, there was an opportunity to provide its listeners with evidence of RFE's disruptive presence.<sup>121</sup> Hansen's letter to Nixon focused mainly on questioning RFE's assertion that its purpose was to fill "the information gaps of the residents of Eastern (sic) Europe." If that was really the case, Hansen rather cheekily suggested that the job could be "undertaken just as well — if not better — by the 'Deutsche

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<sup>118</sup> "KNR," 2 June 1971, 61. HU OSA 300-50-16: 266/1.

<sup>119</sup> "KNR," 4 June 1971, 95. HU OSA 300-50-16: 266/1.

<sup>120</sup> "KNR," 18 June 1971, 49. HU OSA 300-50-16: 266/4.

<sup>121</sup> "Translation (deputy Hansen)," 1-2. HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 1765/6; "KNR," 31 July 1972, 31. HU OSA 300-50-16: 287/3.

Welle.”<sup>122</sup> Unsurprisingly, this was not a detail focused on by Polish media. However, the fact that this letter was written at all was a boon for Polish propaganda, as its long-running claims about RFE being an obstacle to diplomatic peace in Europe were legitimized by sources outside Poland, and indeed, outside the Soviet bloc.

In assessing the effect of the Polish media campaign against RFE in the run-up to the Munich Olympics, it might be tempting to simply take the fact that Bonn did not revoke any broadcasting licenses as an indication of failure. For all the West German press coverage questioning why RFE received such consistent support during a time of supposed opening towards Eastern Europe, there are examples of papers such as Munich’s *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, which translated whole days of RFE broadcasts from Polish into German and printed them in their entirety to show everyday Germans how non-ideological RFE’s content was.<sup>123</sup> Examples such as Hansen’s letter can be contrasted by statements made to RFE officials by Bundestag member Erich Riedl, who declared that “the continuation of the operation of your two radio stations is more important than the Olympic Games.”<sup>124</sup>

However, if one takes the fact that, as discussed earlier, the IOC sent the directors of RFE and RL letters about broadcast content prior to the games, and that three weeks before the games began, RFE director Ralph E. Walter wrote to each director of each of RFE’s national desks

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<sup>122</sup> Karl-Heinz Hansen and Others to Richard Nixon, 20 March 1972. HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 1765/6.

<sup>123</sup> Mickelson, “RFE/RL Inc. and the Issue of Accreditation for the 1980 Olympic Games,” 46.

<sup>124</sup> Ernest Langendorf to Ralph E. Walter, 17 February 1971, 2. HIA, RFE/RL Inc. Corporate Records: 1765/2.

proposing to “agree that we will continue to keep politics out of our own Olympic reporting,”<sup>125</sup> a hazier picture is found. A few months after the Olympics, Gierek identified RFE as a key “external center of subversion” against the PRL, and called for “more aggressive and effective actions” to be taken against it.<sup>126</sup> What is more certain is that in this phase of Polish attacks on RFE, the same overarching trend appeared as had been established in previous years. The world in 1972 was not the same as it was in 1952, and the contours of peace for Poland and the world in general had changed accordingly. Corresponding to this change was the way RFE was presented in Polish media, consistently as a danger to peace, whether that be moving beyond the ravages of Nazism in the immediate post-war years, or in 1972, as a counter-force to the peaceful Olympic ideal and thaw of Cold War tensions.

#### Conclusion:

From the earliest RFE broadcasts in Poland through the 1972, communist Poland’s media maintained a robust oppositional campaign. The contours of the Cold War evolved over the course of these years, and those shifts were reflected in the way Polish radio and press treated RFE. Nonetheless, a pattern of portrayal can be traced throughout this time, one that consistently made RFE out to be an agent of conflict, one that aimed to disrupt Poland’s domestic peace, as well as that of Europe, and even the rest of the world. Initially, this was a threat portrayed as being the product of Nazism’s legacy in West Germany, and specifically in RFE’s operations. When Brandt was elected as West Germany’s Chancellor and opened Bonn’s relations with the

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<sup>125</sup> Ralph E. Walter, “Memorandum,” 2 August 1972. HIA, Sig Mickelson Collection: 9.

<sup>126</sup> “Document No. 38: 1972. Gierek Calls For Offensive Action against ‘Centers of Subversion,’” in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Studies and Documents*, edited by A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 506.

Soviet bloc, RFE's continued presence on West German territory became, for Polish media, an obstacle to the development of mutually beneficial bilateral relations. Around this same time, with RFE's future role and financial background being openly questioned in Congress, RFE could be portrayed as existing only on the strength of certain cynical Americans aiming to perpetuate the Cold War. The 1972 Olympics presented another opportunity for this propaganda approach, as the "inciting station" in Munich's agenda was contrasted to the peaceful and universalistic ethics of the Olympic ideal.

The Cold War is, of course, over, and if one were to judge the outcome of RFE and PRL media's battle "in Polish souls and within the four walls of Polish homes," *Radio Warszawa* and the rest of Polish media certainly came out on the losing end. When Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the Solidarity movement and an instrumental figure in bringing democracy to Poland, was asked about the role RFE played in democracy's development in Poland, he replied with a rhetorical question, asking, "'is the sun important for the Earth?'"<sup>127</sup> Clearly, this propaganda did not reach a level of success anywhere close to what its creators would have imagined. However, while RFE may not have a presence in Poland, it remains in operation in 23 other countries, where it still runs into frequent opposition from governments and their agents.<sup>128</sup>

Additionally, the battles waged around RFE have been invoked by those who see a clash between the Western and Muslim worlds as a new ideological competition in the Cold War's

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<sup>127</sup> Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, 1.

<sup>128</sup> rferl.org presently describes the station's purpose as "[providing] what many people cannot get locally: uncensored news, responsible discussion, and open debate." For an example of actions taken against its journalists, see: "Ukrainian Ex-Lawmaker Says Russia-Backed Separatists Confirm They Are Holding Blogger." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 17, 2017. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-separatists-confirm-holding-aseyev-blogger/28620536.html>.



mold.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, a letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri, then second in al-Qaeda's chain of command, sent to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq (a precursor to the Islamic State) in 2005 declared that "more than half of" the battle the two terrorists were in as taking place in the "battlefield of the media," a battle "for the hearts and minds of our [Muslim Community]." <sup>130</sup> The parallels between the language used here and that used by the protagonists of the Cold War's radio battles is striking. Studying the past successes and failures in conventional warfare brings new influences and lessons to the development of future strategy. The same holds true for the sort of information battles that RFE and its counterparts engaged in. Thus, in understanding the way soft ideological wars were fought in the not-too-distant past, an insight can be gained into how these battles will be waged in the future.

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<sup>129</sup> Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, 1; "Hoover Institution; From Hoover Press: Communicating with the World of Islam, edited by A. Ross Johnson, principal report by George P. Shultz." *Telecommunications Weekly*; Atlanta, May 26, 2008: 111. <http://ezproxy.ups.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/217329801?accountid=1627>.

<sup>130</sup> Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (Transworld Publishers, London, 2015), 259.

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